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KERALA ON HIGH ALERT OVER FLOOD, CYCLONE THREATS

With heavy rains pounding Kerala for the past two days, the state govt has started evacuating people from low-lying areas

RAINS LASH STATE, SEA SWALLOWS HOUSES

While non-stop rains have led to waterlogging and uprooting of trees, high waves and sea incursion damaged several houses in coastal hamlets across the state. Chellanam, a coastal village in Ernakulam district, which is already reeling under Covid load with test positivity rate way above the state average, was among the worst-hit as tidal waves entered homes | P5

I.M.D. SOUNDS RED ALERT IN FIVE DISTRICTS

- IMD has sounded red alert in Malappuram, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Kannur and Kasaragod projecting extremely heavy rains due to a depression in the Arabian Sea, which is forecast to turn into Cyclone Tauktae. The cyclone is set to affect the entire western coastline right up to Gujarat, where it is likely to hit on May 18

MAY 31

SOUTHWEST MONSOON TO ARRIVE A DAY EARLIER THAN ITS NORMAL ONSET

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

2 bn doses a tall order: Experts

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

A day after the Centre projected the availability of a whopping 2 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines in India during the last five months this year, experts expressed scepticism over the numbers saying they look impractical if not impossible.

India at present produces 2.3 million doses of Covid-19 vaccine daily, which needs to be scaled up six-fold between August and December if the ambitious target is to be met.

Niti Aayog member V K Paul, who also heads the National Covid-19 task force, had on Thursday said 2.16 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines will be be available in the country between August and December, enough to cover nearly 95 crore of India's adult population.

The projected doses include 75 crore of Covishield, 55 crore of Covaxin and 15.6 crore of Sputnik V, whose local production will begin in July.

The estimates also included 30 crore doses by BioE, 5 crore of Zydus Cadila vaccine, 20 crore of Serum Institute of India's Novavax, 10 crore of Bharat Biotech-Washington University's nasal vaccine and 6 crore of Gennova vaccine, all of which are still under various phases of clinical trials. How can their production be ramped up so quickly?

"It is a very ambitious target. I would be surprised if that's achieved, but I am not sure how that is going to happen," said microbiologist and immunologist Sudhanshu Vrati.

According to R Ramakumar, an economist with Tata Institute of Social Sciences, as per the projections, SII will have to raise the production of Covishield by nearly three times per day to meet the target.

"SII is already struggling to meet the promise of 3.3 million doses of Covishield per day by July. How are they going to make 6.4 million doses per day by December?" he asked.

CONTINUED ON: P8

NATIONWIDE	MAY 13	MAY 14
Fresh cases	3,62,727	3,43,144
Recoveries	3,52,181	3,44,776
Deaths	4,120	4,000

JAB-O-METER

TAKE YOUR SHOT

May 13: 19,75,176 doses

May 14: 10,79,759 doses

TOTAL DOSES: 18,04,29,261

HARD TIMES

An elderly couple being ferried on a luggage trolly to a train at the Krantivira Sangolli Rayanna Railway Station in Bengaluru on Friday | VINOD KUMAR T

State falling short of 900 tons of O_2 every day; needs 1.2K MT

RANJANI MADHAVAN @ Bengaluru

HOSPITALS and medical centres across Karnataka are consuming a little over 800 metric tonnes of medical oxygen daily while the requirement is about 1,700 MT. The acute shortfall is to the extent of 850-900 MT daily, requiring immediate supply of at least 1,200 MT of medical oxygen to prevent any catastrophe like the Chamarajanagar hospital tragedy.

As per data shared by IAS officer Munish Moudgil, who is in charge of oxygen management, 700.74 kilo litres (800 metric tonne) of medical oxygen were consumed on May 6 and 723.86 kilo litres (826 metric tonne) on May 9. The shortfall on May 9 was 874 metric tonnes (1 kilo litre of oxygen is 1.1417 metric tonne) to reach the consumption requirement of 1,700 MT daily, and it continues daily in that range, he pointed out.

The data collected manually from each deputy commissioner and zone, does not fluctuate much on a daily basis. The highest consumption is in Bengaluru Urban at about 296 MT on May 6 and May 9 each. This is followed by Mysuru with usage of about 49 MT on May 9, Dharwad with 45 MT, Belagavi 28.5 MT, Ballari 27 MT, Bagalkot and Vijayapura with 25 MT each.

In some districts such as Ballari, Bengaluru Rural, Chikkamagaluru, Kalaburagi, Raichur, Ramanagara, Tumakuru, Udupi and Yadgir, the consumption reduced on May 9 from what was used on May 6. Moudgil attributed this decrease to oxygen audit being done by districts and all Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike zone nodal officers for each and every hospital. "We have put in place an elaborate system with every district and BBMP zone having dedicated oxygen nodal officers and camp officers who camp full time at the 57 refilling stations and manufacturers' units. P4

Modi red-flags Covid acceleration in rural areas

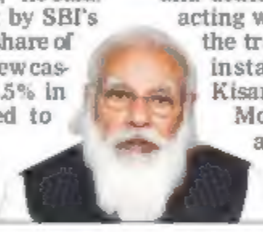
MANISH ANAND @ New Delhi

IN his first public comment after the second wave of Covid-19 wreaked havoc, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday sent out a message of hope while warning farmers to stay on guard as the pandemic is fast advancing into rural India.

"This pandemic is spreading fast in rural villages.... Awareness about this among rural people and cooperation of panchayat raj institutions are equally important," he said.

A recent report by SBI's Ecowrap said the share of rural districts in new cases increased to 48.5% in May as compared to 36.8% in March.

However, Modi added, "India is not a nation that loses hope in tough times. This challenge will be overcome with strength and dedication," while interacting with farmers to mark the transfer of the eighth installment of the PM-Kisan Nidhi scheme.



Modi's optimism came at a time when the Centre and the states are sparring over the availability of vaccines, high fatalities and lack of medical support to the affected people. While he refrained from fixing accountability for the lapses that led to the explosive second wave, he claimed the world is facing an invisible enemy and "every government department is working day and night to ease the pain of the nation."

KARNATAKA	MAY 13	MAY 14
Fresh cases	35,297	41,779
Recoveries	34,057	35,879
Deaths	344	373

EXPRESS READ

55L K'taka farmers get ₹985.61 cr under scheme

Bengaluru: Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Friday said that over 55 lakh farmers across the state have received a total financial benefit of ₹985.61 crore directly into their bank accounts as the first instalment for the fiscal, under the PM-KISAN scheme. P3

K'TAKA SEES NEARLY 600 COVID DEATHS AT HOME IN A MONTH

RANJANI MADHAVAN @ Bengaluru

IN a span of just one month, the state has seen 599 Covid-19 patients succumbing at home due to delay in reaching hospitals and shortage of beds, among other factors. This includes 120 deaths between April 13 and April 30 and a sudden spike of 479 deaths between May 1 and May 13, with the highest being reported on May 12, with 88 fatalities, as per the state Health Department data.

Experts and those on the ground who are aiding patients in finding hospital beds, point to the inability to find a hospital bed in time. The number of people needing oxygen support and hospitalisation has increased in direct proportion to the rising number of positive cases, pointed out Dr Nanda Kumar B S, Associate Professor, Community Medicine, M S Ramaiah Medical College.

"Due to scarcity of beds, patients are not reaching hospitals in time. In addition to this, the fatality in the double mutant cases is high due to more virulence. The time taken for the disease severity to increase is shortening from six or eight days to three or four days, including symptoms of pneumonia, ground glassing of lungs, breathlessness, etc," Dr Nanda Kumar said, adding that early diagnosis and treatment will reduce mortality. Ameen E Mudassar, a volunteer with Emergency Response Team that works full time to locate beds, oxygen and Covid-19 drugs for people, said they have seen countless cases of people not being able to find beds in time and therefore, succumbing at home. P4

Family members perform the last rites of a person who succumbed to Covid-19, at an open-air crematorium on the outskirts of Bengaluru recently | ASHESHKRISHNA KP

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Dr Nanda Kumar B S, Associate Professor, Community Medicine, M S Ramaiah Medical College

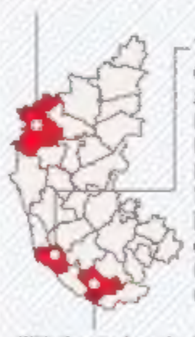
FROM ACROSS THE STATE

5,98,605
TOTAL ACTIVES CASES

1,10,51,982
TOTAL VACCINATIONS

1,27,105
SAMPLES TESTED ON FRIDAY

Belagavi City Corporation, in association with private companies, is planning a new oxygen plant



The number of containment zones in Chamarajanagar has increased to 117 from 50 in just three days, as cases increase in the district

With the attacks on health workers and hospital staff on the rise, more policemen will be posted at Mysuru's hospitals

Dr Reddy's Lab rolls out Sputnik V at ₹995 a dose

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Hyderabad

A day after it obtained clearance from the Central Drugs Laboratory (CDL) in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh, Dr Reddy's Laboratories soft-launched Sputnik V vaccine by administering the first dose in Hyderabad on Friday.

The company had got the first consignment of the Russian vaccine on May 1 and was awaiting clearance from CDL.

While more consignments of Sputnik V vaccine are expected to arrive in the coming months, supply is expected to commence from Indian manufacturing partners, too. The imported vaccine is priced at an MRP of ₹948 plus 5% GST per dose, which comes to ₹995.40. The price is likely to be lowered when local supply begins.

"With the rising cases in India, vaccination is our most effective tool in our battle against Covid-19. Contributing to the vaccination drive is our biggest priority right now to help Indians stay healthy and safe," said G V Prasad, co-chairman and MD of Dr Reddy's Laboratories.

Meanwhile, Zydus Cadila announced plans to make 5 crore doses of its vaccine, which is under phase-3 clinical trial, by the year-end.

Petrol, diesel prices rise again, reach record highs

New Delhi: Petrol and diesel prices on Friday touched record high levels across the country after rates were increased for the fourth time this week. Petrol price was hiked by 29 paise per litre and diesel by 34 paiseek. Petrol price was hiked by 29 paise per litre and diesel by 34 paise a litre.

Afghan police say Kabul mosque bombing kills 12

Kabul: A bomb ripped through a mosque in northern Kabul during Friday prayers, killing 12 worshippers, and wounding 15, Afghan police said. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. Police said the bomb exploded as prayers had begun.

IYC

president questioned by Delhi Police

B V Srinivas, who has been applauded for aiding people in distress, was questioned on his supply chain of O_2, medicines and relief materials, drawing anger on social media | P7

SERVING CONSTITUENTS

Home Minister's Shiggaon house turned into CCC

ARUNKUMAR HURALIMATH @ Hubballi

AS the state grapples on many fronts in the battle against the pandemic, several political leaders are taking the initiative to set up Covid Care Centres at their own cost. The gravity of the situation can be gauged from the fact that none other than Karnataka Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai has turned his private residence in Shiggaon of Haveri district into a CCC.

The move comes after the number of Covid-19 cases started increasing in his home district Haveri. Bommai handed over his house to the local administration in order to overcome the shortage of beds in the government and private hospitals, and it was converted into a CCC in no time.

As many as 50 beds have been set up in the front yard of his residence with necessary medical facilities. Soon, 50 oxygen concentrators will be installed near each bed to provide oxygen to Covid-19 patients. The oxygen concentrators are expected to arrive in the next two days.

On Friday, after inspecting facilities at his house, Bommai said a team of medical professionals, including government and private doctors and nurses, will be deployed at the CCC to attend on patients round the clock. Bommai has now shifted to his residence in Hubballi along with his family.

An official from the district administration noted that most of the beds in the taluk hospital, which are attached with oxygen cylinders, have been occupied and it has become difficult to find such beds in private hospitals too. Dr P H Hanumantappa, Chief Medical Officer, general hospital, Shiggaon, said those who are recovering in the hospital will be shifted to the CCC and treated there. "The CCC, with oxygen concentrators, will help accommodate more patients in the hospital and also reduce the death rates in the taluk," he said.

It is said to be the first instance in the country where a minister's residence has been converted into a CCC.

Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai inspects the Covid Care Centre at his house in Shiggaon on Friday | EXPRESS

State Congress leaders offer to procure vaccines at ₹100 crore

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

AFTER offering to pay for the tickets of migrant workers who were heading back home during the lockdown last year, Congress leaders in the state on Friday said they are willing to procure Covid-19 vaccines for the people. Karnataka Pradesh Congress committee president D K Shivakumar said ₹100 crore, which includes ₹10 crore from the party funds as a commitment towards the fight against Covid-19, and ₹90 crore from MP/MLA/MLC local area development funds, public donations and fund-raisers, etc., will be set aside to procure vaccines directly from manufacturers.

The offer came with a request that the State and Central governments allow the Congress party to procure vaccines directly. The initiative is being seen as an attempt to put both the State and Centre on the mat over the vaccination policy.

"The government has miserably failed to protect the people and vaccinate them. Hence, our party MPs, MLAs and MLCs, who are 95 in number, have decided to donate at least Rs 1 crore each to procure vaccines," said former Chief Minister and Congress Legislature Party leader Siddaramaiah. The decision comes barely two days after the State Government suspended the vaccination drive for those aged between 18-44 due to shortage in supplies. P5

KPCC president DK Shivakumar and former CM Siddaramaiah at the Congress office in Bengaluru on Friday